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Dean Logan's Blog

RWU Team Snags “Best Brief” Award and #2 Overall in National Admiralty Law Competition

Posted by David Logan on 04/17/2013 at 04:14 PM

This was the 20th year of the Judge John R. Brown Admiralty Moot Court Competition, held this time in the beautiful seaside town of Charleston, South Carolina (the Newport of the South?). While RWU Law won the whole shooting match in 2009 (the talented trio of Amanda Argentieri, Brian Eisenhower, and Ben Sussman), this year’s RWU Law team (Chris McNally, Kyle Smith, and William Yost) also performed superbly, picking up a “Best Brief” Award and losing by a fraction of a point to Richmond in the championship round. This represents another feather in the cap for the RWU Moot Court Program, as earlier this year a team of 3Ls placed fourth in the National Moot Court Competition. <http://law.rwu.edu/blog/rwu-final-four-national-moot-court-competition>

Below is a pic of this year’s Admiralty team in Charleston with its Coach, attorney Bob Falvey, and below the team back in RI with faculty coach Professor Jonathan Gutoff. After that comes Kyle’s reflections on his experience; especially interesting are his comments on the role technology played in their successful effort.



Kyle, Coach Falvey, Chris and Will



Through the lengthy preparation process, we learned how a real team operates. We had no professor, as per the rules, to push us through or guide us along the way with that invaluable advice all law school professors give, “It looks good, BUT...” or “It’s a good start, BUT...”. Sometimes we completely agreed on how to handle the issues, and sometimes we had three different ideas, each of us reluctant to concede anything. We experimented with technology and decided that programs like DropBox allowed us to always have an up to date version of the brief so that we could avoid duplicating work or straying too far from the direction of the brief. With DropBox we were able to share cases that we located and allowed us to have an almost real-time log of changes made and the status of the different sections we were drafting.

With the due date approaching we knew we would make one last push and we looked to our appointed “brief writer” Will Yost and said, “what about all these cases, and what about all these arguments we can’t leave them out!”, but in the end we agreed to disagree and let the “brief writer” work his magic. After a marathon editing session we finally cut it loose.

This feeling of relief from completing the brief, while welcome, was as fleeting as the sight of a tropical island on the horizon after weeks at sea that disappears in the blink of an eye. We were decidedly a team by this point and somehow had not given in to the urge to strangle each other. Now was time to master the oral arguments, which we all thought would be easy after the grind of writing the brief. We went from mundane formalities (like mastering the “May it please the court”) to the challenge of compacting arguments and preparing for a fusillade of questions. Over the final three weeks we actually began to have a bit of fun, as alums, faculty, and practitioners knowledgeable in Admiralty were dedicated to getting us into fighting shape.

Our arrival in Charleston was to a warm (to us) 60 degree day which we enjoyed by walking the city, appreciating the architecture and being told it was too cold to sit outside for a drink. (Which we promptly disregarded and went outside, only to be greeted by a dolphin swimming no

more than 50 feet from where we sat.) The next morning we were excited to finally compete, and we stormed through the first two rounds, besting William and Mary and the University of Miami. In the third round we faced, and beat, a strong team from Duquesne. We made it to the quarterfinal match that afternoon besting the University of Houston. Through the first three rounds we made a good showing and became smoother and more sophisticated in our presentation, we were now really starting to look like a team that had done this before, and we advanced to the semifinals. Saturday morning arrived with spirits high and a hopeful attitude flowing from the coach Robert Falvey, infecting us all with his can-do attitude. We entered the semi-finals against the reigning Best-Oral Advocate and his teammate (from the University of Texas) only to send them off to the bar earlier than they may have expected.

The finals were presided over by four judges from the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. We faced a very experienced Richmond team and when the dust settled only a sliver separated the teams. There is always a sense of disappointment that comes from being that close to your goal and falling just short. However, placing second and receiving the award for the Best Respondent's Brief, is an accomplishment that the three of us are extremely proud of and something 24 other teams would have killed to achieve, something we would never have accomplished without our hard work and the all the institutional support we received.